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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to determine the perceptions of graduate students regarding the time spent in taking a course via the Internet compared to taking a class in the "regular" classroom. Graduate students completed a course in research on curriculum and instruction taught entirely via a Web-based program and email. Students would read articles and post their responses to given questions each week; they would read and post comments to assigned group members. Results indicated that the majority of students felt that more time was spent on the Internet-based class than in the regular classroom. They also indicated that self-discipline and self-motivation were necessary to complete a course via the Internet. These findings indicate that course content and delivery systems need to be evaluated to determine a more equitable way of delivering courses through distance learning. (Author/AEF)

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Graduate Students' Perceptions of Time Spent in Taking a Course

by Internet vs Taking a Course in a Regular Classroom

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to determine the perceptions of graduate students regarding the time spent in taking a course via the Internet compared to taking a class in the regular classroom. Graduate students completed a course in Research on Curriculum and Instruction taught entirely through a web based program and e-mail. Student would read articles and post their responses to given questions each week. They would read and post comments to assigned group members. Results indicated that the majority of students felt that more time was spent in taking a class via the Internet than in the regular classroom. They also indicated that self-discipline and self-motivation were necessary to complete a course via the Internet. Based on these findings, course content and delivery systems need to be evaluated to determine a more equitable way of delivering courses through distance learning.

Graduate Students' Perceptions of Time Spent in Taking a Course
by Internet vs. Taking a Course in a Regular Classroom
Perspective

Distance learning is attracting a growing population of adult learners who want to start or complete college degrees. It provides a means to maintain employment while studying at home. The growth in distance learning is phenomenal. Laws (1996) provides a wealth of information on the road to a successful college degree through home study. The problem is that there is a high dropout rate among students (Kember, 1989). Reasons range from student related to course related factors. Student related factors include family and work demands that interfere with the ability to complete assignments (Kember, 1989, Naidu, 1989-90). Course related factors include the social and intellectual isolation that results from not being able to interact with the instructor and other students (Naidu, 1989-90).

Online courses tend to be more time consuming for the instructor and students (Harris, 1994, Hiltz, 1990). The textual nature of the class may cause information overload with numerous postings to read on a daily basis. The chance of frustration increases as the size of the group and class grows (Harasim, 1990). The inability to see facial expressions or interpret wit and humor in text based interactions can add to increased feelings of social insecurity (Romiszowski & de Haas, 1991). This coupled with the loss of time from family and work to complete assignments can result in a student's inability to complete the course.

Objectives

The purpose of this study was to determine students' perceptions of the actual time required in taking a course via the internet compared to taking a class in a traditional setting. It also examined self perceived learning strategies needed for success in completing a course delivered by computer.

Method and Data Source

Graduate students completed a course in Research on Curriculum and Instruction taught entirely through a web based program and e-mail. Of the 16 students (13 females, three males) enrolled in the course, 14 were Caucasian, one was African American and one was Hispanic. The syllabus and course notes were posted in the web based program. Students were instructed to read articles in their textbook and respond to given questions each week. They were to post their responses to the questions, read the responses of assigned group members, and respond to their comments. In addition, they were given three outside assignments including a research paper. At the end of the semester, the students were sent a questionnaire related to their learning experience. Data in the form of open-ended responses were obtained from the students. The responses were content analyzed and grouped in empirically generated categories.

Results

Results indicated that the majority of students responding felt that more time was spent on taking this course via the internet (55%) while over a third felt that the same amount of time was spent on taking this course via the internet and a course in a regular classroom (36%). When asked how much time was spent on

this internet course compared to an in-person class, Cathy wrote "A LOT MORE than a regular classroom. It was VERY TIME CONSUMING" Misty responded, "This internet class required more time than a regular in-person class because all responses had to be written. However, the time spent could be broken into sections. Rather than spend three hours at a time, one could work for three one-hour segments. The time spent was more but also more convenient" While, Marguerite stated, " . . . I find the time less since there is no travel or wasted class time. I like the internet classes!"

Students indicated that self-discipline and self-motivation were necessary to complete this class via the internet. When asked what types of learning strategies are necessary for a course by Internet compared to a regular class, Kathryn responded, "Self motivation and discipline are required. An ability to read and comprehend material and communicate the meaning derived to others via written communication." Karen stated, "Lots of reading and writing is necessary. Students must be able to follow written instructions, this may be difficult for the verbal learner. . . ." And, Misty replied, "I found that taking a course on the internet required me to pace myself, plan ahead, and always be prepared. I did not have time to waste."

Discussion and Educational Importance

Students in this study indicated that they needed self-discipline and self-motivation in order to complete a class via the internet. Hiltz (1990) also found that students likely to succeed in online courses tend to be self-disciplined, have average or higher verbal and quantitative skills, and easy access to the necessary

equipment. The Web may increase access to education (Owston, 1997), but it should not be recommended for all students.

The majority of students felt that more time was spent taking the course by Internet. This is time that may be taken away from their family and workloads. The use of the Internet to deliver distance education is a trend likely to continue (Sherritt & Basom, 1997). Based on these findings, course content and delivery systems need to be evaluated to determine a more equitable way of delivering courses through distance learning. Certain courses may be more amenable to distance learning than other classes. Additional studies should be made comparing the time required in taking classes via the internet and taking classes in person.

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